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ABSTRACT

This paper presents various issues surrounding the education of immigrant students from the tropical islands north of Aotearoa-New Zealand, particularly the Kingdom of Tonga. It argues that technocratic approaches to practice in an urban, English-speaking, coeducational secondary school requires transformation into much more inclusive programs that consider historical, social, economic, and political contexts if students are to actively understand and be involved in their education, school, and society. The paper stresses the importance of valuing students' language and culture by focusing on the partnership between a "discourse of technocratic pedagogy" and indigenous ways of thinking about the world (that is, learning and teaching as a partnership in which the teacher and students are critically aware and proud of their language, beliefs, traditions, values, and priorities, thus creating a richer pedagogical context). The perspective is that critical awareness is part of a process by which they can come to understand more deeply possible connections between technocratic pedagogy and political, social, and economic forces and how their own culture can be accented or marginalized by the mass media, economic institutions, and educational institutions within the dominant New Zealand European/Palangi society. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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A Critical Theory to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) The promising focus for Indigenous perspectives

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Abstract

There exists within the professional field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) educative practices that have not been addressed. Taking the way in which the particular field is frequently appropriated as teaching practice embedded in the intentional or unintentional discourse of assimilation, many Indigenous teachers often end up concentrating their educational presentations on the prevailing technocratic assumptions, at the expense of lives lived within diverse cultural universes.

In the paper, two pedagogical contexts are presented. First, the 'A.S.B. Bank Auckland Secondary Schools Mäori and Pacific Islands Cultural Festival' called in the Tongan language, Katöanga Faiva. Second, a place and a process for educating Tongan people in the night called Pö Ako.

The purpose of the paper is to present some of the complex ideas and issues of educating immigrant students from the tropical islands north of Aotearoa-New Zealand, in particular, the Kingdom of Tonga. It is argued that technocratic approaches of practice in an English-speaking co-educational secondary school, in the city, requires transformation into much more inclusive programmes that apprehend the historical, social, economic, and political contexts; if the students are to continue their education not simply to absorb prescribed information and ideas but to actively understand, question, and challenge them to change the classroom and society.

The paper stresses the importance of valuing the students' language and culture by focussing a new attentiveness to the partnership between what will be called a discourse of technocratic pedagogy and Indigenous ways of thinking about the world. That is, learning and teaching as a partnership in which the teacher and the students critically aware and proud of their language, beliefs, traditions, values and priorities create a richer pedagogical context. The perspective is that critical awareness is part of a process by which they can come to understand more deeply possible connections between technocratic pedagogy and the political, social, and economic forces, and how their own culture can be accentuated or marginalised by the mass media, economic institutions, educational institutions of the dominant New Zealand European/Palangi society.

Perspectives

The paper is presented from the perspectives of a Mäori and a Tongan teacher looking to aspects of their Indigenous cultures to transform the current narrow, value-free, technocratic methods fetish that tends to exclude the students from education and learning in Aotearoa. The focus is that experiences from the Mäori and Tongan cultural milieu contribute authentic insights and different viewpoints from which to draw upon during a person's professional practice in the particular field. The foremost concern of the paper is with Tongan students whose language and culture, body and spirit, heart and soul are disqualified in the English-speaking pedagogical environment. It should be pointed out that pedagogy incorporating the social, economic and political relations either inside or outside of the classroom, emphasizes linking critique to grassroots organisations and the school and this means taking risks - isolation from colleagues, friends, students, parents, and most likely resignations.

To make better sense of the perspectives necessitate that a clear distinction be made between people whose culture is marginalised and education alienated, and those that participate more or less unobstructed in Aotearoa. Thus, the marginalised groups are constituted principally of Mäori and Tongan people living in Aotearoa. Both are communities whose position has been decided historically through military conquest, or social, or economic, or political alienation. Second, the preferred perspective of Indigneous identity is the one that accentuates the affairs, problems, and clashes of colonised peoples and not the notion that emphasizes the progeny of settlers who lay claim to an Indigenous identity merely through being born in this country. The point being made is that in contrast to the Indigenous people who actively struggle against cultural, educational, and economic discrimination the latter group's power, privilege, and history are all grounded in their legacy as colonisers.

Third, the discourse of technocractic pedagogy refers to the assumption that the curriculum consisting in centralisation, standardisation, managing, targeting, funding and that is effective for English-speaking New Zealand European/Palangi students will benefit Tongan students. The critical perspective is that technocratic approaches of practice are similar to the 'one-size fits all' marketing concept that would have buyers believe that there is an ideal size among men and women. On this marketised understanding of education, school curricula in Aotearoa have been established primarily for fluent English speakers, thereby according

primacy to English as the language of school and the classroom. Today, despite the existence of bilingual education programmes established for the students, in early childhood and primary education in particular, and even in the face of widespread linguistic heterogeneity in schools, English is still perceived as the only valid language of the classroom and school. The assertion that English is the only legitimate language for learning and that technocratic approaches to practice are appropriate for Tongan students are challenged in this discussion. Instead, the call is for pedagogy that is a richer synthesis of knowledge and critical awareness of a person's intimate environment. All of this means that education is political.

A multicultural triumph or not?

The annual 'ASB Bank Auckland Secondary Schools Mäori & Pacific Islands Cultural Festival' takes place in the 'largest Polynesian city' in the world called Auckland. The event is where Tongan and Mäori people, among other Indigenous communities, 'showcase' their songs, dances and costumes over a period of three days in a park designed for cycling events.

Amongst Auckland secondary schools principals and business people, the festival is promoted as a 'multicultural triumph' and a site where the students experience their particular culture. The critical perspective is that that the festival is a place where Tongan language and culture are marginalised. The point being made is that while the festival produces what the schools and the mass media have called a 'multicultural triumph' and 'community participation,' it could also be argued that the educational potentials of the festival are denied by the separation of Tongan language and culture, context and history, theory and practice. In other words, while Tongan students are trained in the detailed performance of the skills of their performing arts they are not taught the language, knowledge, politics and histories that underpin their cultural practices. The corollary is rote learning of Tongan songs and dances. Thus, in denying Tongan students intellectual work, and emphasizing only the practical aspect of Tongan culture, the school reduces the possibilities of profound education and learning for them on stage.

The way the festival is 'showcased' simply reflects and reproduces the unequal power relations in the English-speaking classroom where the education of Tongan students is not fulfilled. Consider for a moment that the Auckland Principals' Association who manages the

budget and controls the decision-making owns the festival. The Organizing Committee manages the rules, marking schedule, and stage locations. It should be highlighted that the Organizing Committee is composed of Mäori, Tongan, Samoan, and Niuean teachers who work in a host school and community representatives. In exercising the unequal relationships of power, the belief that Mäori, Tongan, Samoan, Niuean and Cook Islands Mäori people are incapable of making decisions about how to manage themselves and control resources such as money is produced and sustained.

From an educational perspective, the students' participation in the festival has been regarded by some teachers, politicians and increasing numbers of Tongan parents as a waste of time because 'real' learning is what takes place in the classroom in English and what is examined at the end of the year in the English language. At a political level, the people who object to the students' performing in the festival believe that technocratic approaches of practice are acultural, ahistorical, neutral and objective. The perspectives are problematic. In the first place, the language of the dominant New Zealand European/Palangi society is English. Second, the dominant culture marginalises Tongan language, arts, songs and dances. The critical implication for learning academic work is that culture is inclusive of peoples' identity, knowledge, beliefs, customs, institutions, rituals, games, tools, dwellings, and all other things that strengthen their capability to produce knowledge. When language and arts are differentiated as belonging to 'high cultures' (theoretically informed, e.g. New Zealand European/Palangi culture) and 'low cultures' (simple performance, e.g. Tongan culture) there is a serious implication for Tongan performing arts that lies in the separation of context from history. In other words, when the arts are not learned in context, the practice is a prescription of skills that the performers learn by rote and mimicking. This training can only lead to confused performers passively receiving deposits of fragmented information transmitted by the teacher who knows everything. As well, the perspective endorses marginalisation as a process for Tongan students to be trained not educated on stage. That is, cultural marginalisation as a process produces people who deny their own knowledge and reproduces the perspective that education takes place only in the English language and culture. The critical attitude is that a focus on skilled 'performance' separated from any understanding of the language; historical, social, political, and economic positioning of Tongans in Aotearoa merely serves ultimately, to reproduce unequal power relations and the demotion of Tongan language and culture on stage.

The critical view is, then, that the ASB Festival is not about Tongan students renewing their relationships through songs and dances whose vibrations heal and make whole the creative forces within the cosmos. Rather, the festival upholds and strengthens the dominant New Zealand European/Palangi society through the disqualification of Tongan people's spirit and body and intimate ways of living. That is the festival, predisposes Tongan people to sing their songs and dances at a festival where art is separated from its culture, history and spirituality and is commercially reproduced or commodified for the interests (meaning sustainable economic development) and taste of the market place. The important perspective is that the festival provides the conditions for Tongan students' disqualification from the prevailing New Zealand European/Palangi society and their own culture.

Paradoxically, though, the festival points to the promising focus for Tongan perspectives on education and learning. That is, the situation offers the possibility to establish separate educational programmes. What is argued, here, is that learning and education take place when Tongan language and culture, context and history, theory and practice are not disqualified on the stage, in the classroom, or in school. For Tongan people, an important purpose of song and dance is to strengthen the relationship between people and their place and history. The issue being raised is that song is spirit. Song is becoming human. Song is the power of vibrations that awaken the relationship between matter and spirit.

The central issue is that separation as a partnership in which, both the school and Tongan people, aware and proud of their language and cultural practices, represents the force for creating a richer pedagogical environment. The insight does not neglect to clarify the political function of education and learning in terms of the important concepts of culture and disqualification. It points to the existence of people and places outside the immediate environment of the classroom as important 'forces' in influencing both day-to-day experiences and the outcomes of the educational process. Finally, separate education presents pedagogical ideas that can be practiced apart or concurrently with the discourse of technocratic pedagogy as possibilities arise.

For a small community of Tongan parents in the city of Auckland, the festival was the epoch of transformation whereby they began to translate their ideas and hopes reflexively for solidarity into educational practice to bring forth their children's knowledge in an educational context called Pō Ako. It is the place and process where a Tongan teacher, some Tongan parents and her likeminded Indigenous colleagues stepped in to promote Tongan children's intimate culture and academic education. It should come as no surprise that the idea was not welcomed by staff members in the wider school. However, as the programme progressed it was supported by the principal, the Board of Trustees and a very small number of the teachers in the school. It is important to note that the few supporters adhered strongly to Christian beliefs and practices.

The term Pō Ako is translated here to mean education and learning that takes place in the night. In the Kingdom of Tonga, the night is when the temperature is favourable to human beings, parents are free from the harsh daily routine, and the air is overwhelmed with the scents of nature and a sense of culture and history. In the Kingdom, most parents are familiar with the concept of Pō Ako. There, Pō Ako is where primary school children rote learn English, mathematics, science, social studies and general knowledge to pass the national examination that will permit a child to enter a secondary school. In Aotearoa, the particular urban version is a critical communal action that includes the personal experience of Tongan people and constitutes for them a way to understand how to become decision-making citizens in school and wider society. In terms of a place and a process, Pō Ako is separate since it takes place outside of formal school hours and the assumption that technocratic teaching methods will work for all students.

The educative process in Pō Ako occurs in a multiplicity of ways that query the generic instrumental curriculum and dominance of the English language. The present-day realities of cultural marginalisation and educational alienation make it imperative that in the initial stages of the struggle to reconnect with their intimate culture and the school, the community had to tackle the problem piecemeal. Somehow, this particular Tongan neighbourhood had to act communally to establish a separate, constructive, and legitimate innovation against an

educational environment that excludes their children, their language and culture. With all of this in mind, the process began with the Tongan teacher working in collaboration with Tongan academics; Māori, Samoan and Cook Islands Māori colleagues inside and outside of the school who question historical, social, political and economic practices within government-sponsored education. In the beginning, the most important part of the process was the Tongan mothers and their children from the local school district. An ongoing part of the process has been to encourage Tongan fathers to participate in decision-making. The idea is that the process is a relationship that draws from the spirits and lives of Tongan people and establishes possibilities for them to transform their own ways of thinking and talking, and the educational environment in a single secondary school in the city. Pō Ako then is both a place and a process wherein Tongan students who are educationally alienated in school by day are offered tutelage in the weak subjects at night by Tongan women and men.

One of the major objectives of the Pō Ako as a process includes clarifying new concepts that obstruct the adolescents' thinking and then relating them to their personal and collective environments so that they can take part in full education and learning in the classroom. A simple example is that the curriculum content is questioned and clarified in a way different from the students' routine learning context. By this is meant that the Tongan language and culture prevail. English is used in situations where a student resists using Tongan ways of thinking and talking about the production of knowledge or when a parent insists on the 'virtues of English.' Both languages and cultures share an important and valuable place in education and learning in the Pō Ako. Of course, the language that is deemed most powerful for this specific Tongan community is the preferred discourse of education and learning. The inclusion of Tongan language and culture emphasizes a process wherein subject-content is perceived by the tutor and the students as a critical challenge with a participatory response. A vital part of learning in the Pō Ako is that a richer methodology enables humour, joking and light relief too. In doing so, the learning environment becomes familiar to all the participants. The point is that to learn using Tongan ways of communicating and representing the world means establishing a situation that enables meaningful communication between the student and the context, the text, the tutor and student, the student and other students, the students and parents. Besides, including the teenagers' personal lived experiences in the educative process brings forth their apprehension of subject-content under study.

The most important notion is that the participants' language and culture are inseparable parts of a richer and critical process for Tongan people learning in a Tongan context in the city in Aotearoa.

Pö Ako as a place has also provided a forum for Tongan parents to speak their own language to question the tutors, the heads of departments, the principal and the coordinator about how and why their older children who want to participate in and accomplish local and national examinations and to preprare for a job and income in the workplace are denied a process of a richer synthesis of knowledge and critical awareness that will work for them, and then to intervene. Thus, the body and spirit of the Pö Ako are Tongan parents, their children, relatives, friends, and the Tongan teacher. The community is bolstered by Indigenous supporters to behold Tongan beliefs, values and aspirations as important parts of the educative process to draw out the students' capacity to know about themselves and then to go beyond this intimate knowledge.

In 2001, some of the Tongn tutors who participated in Pö Ako in the early years and a few fathers are the chief organizers. A number of the past students are advancing their education in academies around the world including the United States of America.

The promising focus for Indigenous perspectives

What can the Indigenous teachers make of all this? It should be remembered that schools are complex sites committed to the social and cultural reproduction of technocratic approaches of practice in English-speaking educational institutions. The promising focus for the Indigenous people is that, at the same time, schools are sites of contestation and struggle. For them, the idea is to understand how the mechanisms of cultural marginalisation and educational alienation work in schools so they can be questioned and changed where possible. Of paramount importance is to avoid the pitfall of considering schools as if they existed in a political and social vacuum.

The pedagogical insights advocated, here, strip schools of their innocence since one finds in the assumptions of recipe knowledge, pre-packaged curricula or mechanistic methods to

learning and education, a different set of messages that appear to banish the people and the promise of questioning school knowledge to the realms of mere speculative wisdom.

The crucial notion is to have the Indigenous people in school behold the discourse of technocratic pedagogy as a process that reflects the social practices and cultural beliefs necessary to emphasize the technocratic curriculum that resides in its ability to impose English through the preference, formation, and dissemination of school knowledge and classroom social relationships. In other words, the historical, economic, social, and political forces that weigh heavily on pedagogical theory and practice are visible in a richer synthesis of knowledge and critical awareness since the focus is on personal lived experience in relationship with others the classroom and in school. Another important idea in critical education is that it recognises and responds to pedagogical and political beliefs that marginalise people in school; instead, of translating social and institutional weaknesses into personal issues and concerns.

The critical idea of note is that the relationships and distinctions between technocratic pedagogy, the Indigenous wisdoms and critical intervention discussed, herein, ought not to imply that the pedagogical ideas should be universalised to the exclusion of different ways of thinking and talking about the educational world. The idea is to identify what is valuable in each of them and to produce a richer situation of synthesis where the boundaries and possibilities of each become clear. It should be remembered that the Indigenous concrete experiences are intricate and richly interweave objective, value-free beliefs with their personal language, spirituality, values, and traditions. Hence, a richer synthesis of knowledge in a critical classroom, arises out of a process intertwined with concrete experiences over space and history.

In closing, the important idea for Indigenous teachers is not disappearing within the technocratic approaches of practice but rather merging the moments of theory and practice within and across the communities challenging it. That is creatively merging art, education, and activism by living their daily lives connecting, reflecting and acting to extend Indigenous students' opportunities for education, the students' solidarity with their intimate community, and to reject ideas that marginalise them. The critical perspective is that it is by multiple understandings of how learning is practiced within the classroom and the community rather

than complying and applying prescriptions that a richer pedagogy for the students takes place. The crucial understanding is to resist practising only the language, values, beliefs, and expectations that are associated with the technocratic curriculum.

This is the important task the teachers face if they would build a society where funding for programmes to promote the participation, retention, and achievement in the classroom and school by Indigenous students will no longer be required.

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Bio-statement

The article is based on more than a decade of practice in the professional fields of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and Migrant Education. Also, it is based on 6 years of doctoral study at the School of Education, The University of Auckland, by Dr. Linitä Manu'atu and Dr. Mere Këpa.

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